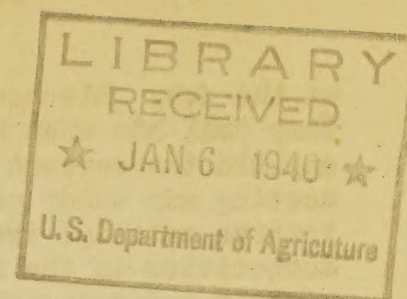


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MY EXPERIENCES IN 4-H CLUB WORK*

By
Walton Thompson, North Carolina

I am indeed happy to be present at this Congress. The privilege of being here to tell you about my experiences in 4-H Club work is due largely to an earnest attempt to live according to the 4-H Club pledge. Perhaps you may be interested in hearing it as given by all members of the 4-H Clubs at their regular club meetings. It is: "I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service, my health to better living, for my club, my community, and my country."

As most of you already know, the 4-H Clubs constitute a national organization of nearly 1,300,000 rural youth conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the various State agricultural colleges. It is the largest rural-youth organization in the world. One of its chief purposes is to help rural boys and girls to conduct better practices in agriculture and homemaking. In North Carolina the slogan is, 4-H Club Work Trains Farm Youth in the Art of Living.

4-H Club work has meant much to me. My experiences in it are many. Thanks to 4-H Club work I have made a profit of a thousand dollars, including scholarships won. I now have poultry, livestock, and crops of my own. This is what 4-H Club work has done for thousands of farm boys and girls. Much credit and praise should go to our State and county extension agents and local club leaders who, through their untiring efforts, have so efficiently guided the destinies of the 4-H Clubs.

One of the greatest benefits I have received from 4-H Club work is learning to improve my own opportunities at home and on the farm simply by learning to do a few things and do them well. This one factor, demonstrated by 4-H Club members, has often been the cause of higher family incomes, which have enabled members to make their homes more attractive, more comfortable, and more livable. Often too, a better understanding is brought about between club members and their parents. Such is the case in my home community.

Learning to do a few things well, along with other phases of 4-H Club work, has helped me, as well as my fellow club members, to develop confidence. This can be illustrated by a boy - we'll say John - who has a cotton club project. This is John's first year with cotton, and he is rather inexperienced. He gets advice from his county agricultural agents, experienced farmers, and different specialists, all of whom are experts

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at the job. His agents visit him and help him personally with his problems. They tell him when and where to plant his cotton in case he does not know, explain the correct methods of combating insects and controlling diseases or meeting any other problems he might face. He receives instruction and illustrative material from his State leaders. This information is compiled by authorities in the field of agriculture. Naturally, doing a few things for himself and doing them well will help him to gain confidence.

Mary becomes confident also when her county home demonstration agent or local leader visits her and assists her in making plans for her home grounds, for she, too, believes in her advisers.

Not only has 4-H Club work caused me to develop confidence but it has caused me to develop determination also, and an incentive to want to climb in life.

Enlarged vision of just what the farm offers rural youth has been made possible by the improved opportunities at home and on the farm through 4-H Club work. We enjoy in a new way the freedom of the open country and appreciate the blessings, the benefits, and the abundant life the country offers.

Moreover, 4-H Club work creates situations that make it possible for every rural boy and girl to develop at least some leadership ability. Dr. C. B. Smith, editor of 4-H Horizons and formerly assistant director of the Federal Extension Service, tells us, "Just as a plan is necessary in building a house, so is a plan - a set of ideals, necessary in the building of a well-managed life." Therefore, 4-H Club members set up goals and objectives and seek to attain them. This is their plan of work, a plan which fills the needs of club members and of the community. It requires and demands cooperation of its members and stimulates within them a desire to assume responsibility and leadership. Through this method, older members assist in getting younger ones to assume responsibility.

4-H Club members avoid selfish notions when they learn to think in terms of what is good for the greatest number of people rather than in terms of selfish interest. In other words, not what there is in the plan for them, but what there is in them for it. Club members are taught to gather all facts and weigh them carefully before making decisions.

4-H Club work provides a means for self-expression. We express ourselves at various 4-H meetings, in presiding as officers and directing recreation, in team-demonstration work, as well as in work done in the home or on the home farm. We express ourselves in dramatics, in community participation, and in our contributions as citizens.

The team demonstration, perhaps, is the best means by which we can express ourselves. Through this means, we are able to pass on to the community what we have learned through our 4-H Club work. Through it we are enabled to develop our personality, our ability to think and work at the same time. We also demonstrate our ability to express ourselves in a

clear-cut way. Of course, we should always practice what we preach in demonstrating correct ways of doing things.

4-H work affords an opportunity for boys and girls to work together. This, in my estimation, is the basic principle underlying two essential things, cooperation and organization. Each member of a club has his or her individual talent, whether it be singing, recreation, handicraft, or music. Each and everyone's contribution is necessary to make the club. Therefore, we all work together and make our contributions to the club. We exchange ideas and opinions as to our 4-H Club work, and in this way come to understand each other better.

Many of our local club meetings are held in the homes of club members and leaders in the community. Here we work and demonstrate under normal conditions, thus meeting real-life situations and facing real problems. We learn to recognize what our problems are, and then we try to solve them.

4-H Club work also provides an opportunity for rural young people to participate in community affairs. Because of their poise, their initiative, and their ability to express themselves, developed largely through their 4-H work, club members are looked up to in the community and are in constant demand for community events.

Through participating in community affairs, I have found that young people like myself become interested in community general welfare. It makes us want to stay in our community and watch, and, at the same time, help it to grow into a better place in which to live - a community of worth-while and upright citizens. Our club tries to interest the entire public in what it is doing, and each year completes a community project for the betterment of the community.

We can say that 4-H Club work broadens the horizons of its members. We are brought closer together through meeting with boys and girls from different communities, at county camps, field days, and achievement days. We meet different people and learn their ways at the State short courses, State fairs, and wildlife-conservation camps. We learn of the club work being carried on in every State in the Union at the national 4-H Club camp, club congress, and other national events.

The lectures and demonstrations given by specialists and club members on various occasions greatly broaden our outlook on life, as well as train us in methods of maintaining a high standard of living in an economical way. Special cultural courses on such subjects as music appreciation, art, and nature are offered also. All this broadens our horizons.

The various vesper programs at camps and short courses and on 4-H Club Sunday, tend to develop our moral and spiritual qualities. Incidentally, the club of which I am a member participated in the county vesper service on 4-H Club Sunday, when we also sponsored a service in our local church.

I have also found that 4-H Club work appeals because it is voluntary and dependent on the young people themselves who seek the guidance of trained and experienced people.

The most important advantages of 4-H Club work that I have experienced and have attempted to relate to you this afternoon are that -

1. It has helped me to improve my own opportunities at home and on the farm.
2. It has created situations that make it possible for me to develop leadership ability.
3. It has provided me a means for self-expression.
4. It has afforded me an opportunity of working together with other boys and girls.
5. It has provided me an opportunity for participating in community affairs.
6. It has tended to broaden my own horizon.

I can safely say that the things I have mentioned are merely a few of those that make the 4-H Club program a most important factor in our democracy.

I have enjoyed being with you and telling you about my experiences in 4-H Club work. In closing, let me leave with you these few lines of Theodore Roosevelt, "If you are going to do anything permanent for the average man, you must begin before he is a man. The chance of success is in working with the boy and not the man."